*Directions: Read and annotate. Come to class prepared to discuss tomorrow.*

**Military's Progress on Women in Combat Criticized**



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WASHINGTON -- A year after the Pentagon opened combat jobs to female servicemembers, plans for integrating women into these jobs remain problematic, women’s advocates said this week.

The Marine Corps and the Army, which have the largest number of military occupational specialties still closed to women, have, according to critics, unclear and inconsistent approaches to integrating women fully into the forces by January 2016, the deadline set by former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta.

The Marines have made little progress in integrating women into jobs they already qualify for, and the purpose of a proposed physical screening test is questionable since it focuses on strength-based measures and not skills actually needed for the work, according to Greg Jacob, a former Marine and policy director of the Service Women’s Action Network.

The Marines’ plan calls for testing women to see if they can deadlift 135 pounds, bench 115 pounds, carry 95 pounds for 50 meters while wearing full combat gear, load a 120mm tank round and scale a 7-foot wall. But these skills might not be needed, Jacob said.

“It’s not looking at the jobs,” Jacob said at a Wednesday briefing on Capitol Hill. “If you want a job in the artillery, you have to pick up the artillery shell and shove it into the breach of the gun. Is this proxy test going to evaluate that? We don’t know. ... It’s a plan, but you’re not really sure what it’s explaining or what it’s doing.”

Jacob also questioned whether the current standards are gender-neutral. “They’re taking the standards that the men are training to and inviting the women to participate,” Jacob said. “And then if the women can pass the standard and the men can pass the standard, does that mean it’s gender-neutral because both genders can pass it? The problem that women are encountering is ... they’re not even able to get into the school to confront these quasi-neutral standards that I would consider male standards.”

To date, 10 women have volunteered for the Marines’ rigorous Infantry Officer Course as part of research on whether or not to keep all-male units closed to women. None have passed.The opening of the course to female Marines is all part of the research for integrating women, said Capt. Maureen Krebs, a Marine spokeswoman.“We are using the time afforded to the Marine Corps by the Secretary of Defense in order to take a systematic approach to integrating women into combat arms specialties by research, assessment and validation of current occupational standards,” Krebs said. “We want to set every Marine up for success.”

The Marines have opened 21 battalions, including artillery, tanks and engineers to female officers and placed NCOs into jobs they could not previously serve in before, according to Krebs.

Since 2012, the Marines have also placed more than 40 female officers and senior NCOs in those battalions to serve as mentors for female Marines who might be assigned there in the future, Krebs said.

“What matters is whether or not the Marine can get the job done,” Krebs said. “If a Marine can get the job done and meet the physical standards required of that job, regardless of gender, they should be allowed the opportunity to realize his or her potential.”

Meanwhile, while the Army this month announced the opening of 33,000 jobs to women in 132 military occupational specialties, allowing women in specialties in which they have long served to do so in direct ground combat units below brigade level. Those positions include medic, Black Hawk pilot, geospatial engineer and paralegal specialist.

“This will allow more flexibility in determining how who gets assigned to a position,” Col. Linda Sheimo, head of the command programs and policy division for the Army deputy chief of staff for personnel, told Stars and Stripes last week. “The focus of the Army implementation plan is to have the best soldier in our Army, and we are on track to accomplish that.”

However, Ranger School still remains closed to women even though the program is not solely for infantry soldiers, Haring said. “Soldiers from all branches attend Ranger School,” according to Army Reserve Col. Ellen Haring of the Combat Integration Initiative with Women in International Security, who spoke on the panel Wednesday. “Continuing to exclude women from accessing this elite leadership school makes it appear that the Army is not confident in women’s leadership or combat service potential.”

The critics, which included veterans and members from the ACLU, National Women’s Law Center and Women’s Research & Education Institute, have called for more transparency into the research and progress the military has made.

The Army has yet to open 100,000 positions in 14 specialties and the Marines still have to open 70,000 positions in 32 specialties, said Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., who has spearheaded efforts highlighting issues females face in the military.

Both branches have taken different approaches to opening up the jobs to women. The Army will first open assignments for women who already qualify for open military occupational specialties while developing standards for the closed ones. The Marines plan is to come up with standards first and then decide whether to open closed MOSs. The inconsistency could cause friction between the two services, critics say. “We need to be able to hold them accountable for preventing the best-qualified individuals from competing for these positions,” Gillibrand said. “Integrating women into combat strengthens our country both morally and militarily.”